

DECISION RECORD
NCA Joint Fire Science Project
DOI-BLM-ID-B011-2011-0016-EA

AUTHORITIES:

I have reviewed the NCA Joint Fire Science Project, DOI-BLM-ID-B011-2011-0016-EA, including the explanation of project design features and have determined that the Proposed Action would be in conformance with the 2008 Morley Nelson Snake River Plains National Conservation Area (NCA) Resource Management Plan Record of Decision. The Proposed Action also meets the NCA's enabling legislation [16 United States Code (USC) 460iii-2; 107 Stat. 304] emphasizing the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitat and values associated with the scientific, cultural, and educational resources of public lands in the NCA.

The proposed action, located in T. 02S, R.01E, Secs. 22,23,26,27 and 28 (Boise 7.5" Quad.) includes the construction of three experimental treatment blocks, totaling 363 acres (4.5 miles of fence) in which a range of fuel treatments would be applied. Fuel treatments would include mowing residual, non-native vegetation, herbicide applications to control invasive annual vegetation, grazing, and drill and broadcast seeding of native Great Basin plant species.

These actions have been designed to incorporate protective measures and implementation requirements that would prevent significant environmental impacts.

TERMS/CONDITIONS/DESIGN CRITERIA STIPULATIONS:

The following protective measures would be applied during project implementation to reduce the probability of residual impacts and the need for subsequent mitigation. It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures identified below.

- 1). No spraying of any herbicide would occur when wind velocity exceeds 10 miles per hour, per Idaho State Department of Agriculture standards, and on sites without 80%-90% live plant and/or plant litter cover.
- 2). Application methods would strictly follow label specifications. The proposed herbicides are BLM-approved, per the 2007 *Final Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* (PEIS) (http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/veg_eis.html).
- 3). Standard Operating Procedures for Applying Herbicides would be strictly enforced.(Appendix 1 DOI-BLM-ID-B011-2011-EA)
- 4). Application of Glyphosate (a post-emergent herbicide) would occur when native Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*) is dormant to reduce impact to remaining extant stands of this native species.

- 5). An Archaeologist approved by the Shoshone Paiute tribe, would be on-site during drill seeding treatments to stop operations if yet undiscovered archaeological resources are located. NCA staff will contact the tribe when drill operations begin in case the tribe wants to send an on-site tribal representative to be present.
- 6). A minimum-till drill would be used to reduce soil and biological crust displacement and accompanying erosion risk.
- 7). All vehicles, tools, and material used during project implementation would be pressure-washed prior to transport to the project site, to avoid the spread of noxious weeds.
- 8). All improvements required for project implementation would be limited to the least intensive method required to meet project objectives, such as using existing tracks/trails where feasible for fence construction access.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY

I have determined that the Proposed Project is in conformance with the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Resource Management Plan (2008). This plan has been reviewed, and the Proposed Action conforms to the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

I have determined that the Proposed Action, with the project design features described above, meets the Determination of Land Use Plan Conformance and NEPA Adequacy Requirements, and that there would be no negative effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action.

Alternatives Considered

The range of alternatives analyzed in the EA considered all treatments and a No Action alternative.

Rationale for the Decision

Despite Federal mandates to restore degraded rangelands (Healthy Lands Initiative 2007) and reduce fire risk on public lands (National Fire Plan 2008a), there is often little information on how restoration treatments in sagebrush steppe actually influence fuel loads, despite various application methods (Perryman et al. 2003). There are few such investigations, within project sites on the Snake River Plain, despite such additional national, multi-agency efforts like the Sagebrush Steppe Project and Great Basin Restoration Initiative.

The proposed cooperative project would provide the experimental framework and necessary replication to provide information on the effectiveness of treatments, such as mowing, grazing, herbicide application, and seeding with native species that demonstrate more competitive characteristics.

Protest and Appeal Language

The decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Public notification of this decision will be considered to have occurred on 2/13/2012. Within 30 of this decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer: Patricia Roller, NCA Manager, Four Rivers Field Office, 3948 Development Ave., Boise, Idaho 83705.

If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

If you wish to file a petition for stay, pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
3. The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the Authorized Officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons, and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and on the Office of the Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400, Boise, Idaho 83706, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the Authorized Officer and/or IBLA.

Authorized Official:

_____/s/ Patricia Roller_____
NCA Manager
Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey NCA

____02/09/2012____
Date